DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 249 038 RC 015 001

AUTHOR Barker, Bruce; And Others
TITLE One-Teacher Schools in America Today.
PUB DATE Oct 84
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Rural Education Association (76th, Olympia, WA, October 7-9, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Access to Education; Educational Facilities; Elementary Education; Enrollment; National Surveys; *One Teacher Schools; Rural Areas; *Rural Education; *Rural Schools; School Community Relationship; School Surveys; *Small Schools; *Teacher Characteristics

ABSTRACT

Questionnaires returned by 402 of a total of 672 teachers in one-teacher schools surveyed in spring 1984 provided data on these teachers and the students, schools, and communities they served. Findings indicated an estimated 800 one-teacher schools operating in 28 states, with the largest number 385, in Nebraska. Average enrollment was 11 elementary students. Most teachers were female (89%), having taught an average of 12 years, with 4.5 years at their present school. The majority either owned their own homes or rented; in addition, one in every four was provided teacherage by the school district. The typical teacher lived about 10 miles from school, 34 miles from a shopping area, and over 110 miles from the nearest college or university. Almost half of all teachers held bachelor's degrees; 30% were working toward master's degrees. The typical teacher spent almost 6 hours in class daily, with an additional 2 3/4 hours spent grading papers and supervising extra-curricular activities. While only 8.7% received compensation, 68% of teachers were responsible for school custodial work. According to teachers, over 34% of students were high achievers, 51% were average, and 15% were low achievers. Over 70% of school buildings were designed and built as one-teacher schools. Almost 50% of the schools were used by community groups for evening or weekend activities. (NEC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED249038

ONE-TEACHER SCHOOLS IN AMERICA TODAY

by

Dr. Bruce Barker
Associate Director of Continuing Education
Assistant Professor of Education
Texas Tech University
Lubbock, Texas 79409

Dr. Ivan Muse
Director of Rural Educuation
Professor of Education
Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah 84602

Dr. Ralph Smith
Dean of Education
Professor of Education
Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah 84602

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ivan D. Muse
Bruce Barker
Ralph Smith.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper presented at 76th Annual Conference of the Rural Education Association. Olympia, Washington October 7-9, 1984.

RC 015001

ONE-TEACHER SCHOOLS IN AMERICA TODAY

By

Bruce Barker, Ivan Muse, and Ralph Smith

Introduction

Although one-teacher schools once dotted the American landscape, they have now all but disappeared from the American educational scene. In 1900, 200,000 one-teacher schools were in operation (Gulliford, 1981). In less than forty years the number had been reduced to 121,310 (Lambert, 1960). By 1948 the number had dropped to less than 75,000 and by 1959 had been whittled to less than 24,000. Even at that time, one in every four public elementary schools in the United States was a one-teacher school (Lambert, 1960). Then came massive consolidation of public school districts during the 1960's and 1970's which virtually eliminated the "little red school house." Today, less than 850 operating public one-teacher schools remain. For the most part, these schools are located in communities too remote for busing of children or too isolated for consolidation.

In 1981, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released information reporting a total of 921 public one-teacher schools in operation. These schools were scattered across 29 different states. During the spring of 1984, the authors contacted each of the 29 state offices of education reporting one-teacher schools in the NCES report. The purpose was to update the number of schools still operating. Contact was made either by telephone, questionnaire, or personal letter. Each of the 29 state offices of education responded. Findings indicated that operative one-teacher schools had declined from 921 schools to an estimated 837 and were now scattered across 28 different states rather than 29. (See Table 1.) The 837 total is estimated due to the fact that

Some of these schools open and close from year to year--and even within the school year--to accommodate population flow and need. Also, in some states, the precise number of one-teacher schools was unknown. For example, Nebraska leads the nation in the number of remaining one-teacher schools. Education in Nebraska is very decentralized and state education officials were not sure of the exact number of one-teacher schools still in operation. They estimated the number at 385. The authors surveyed each of the 93 county superintendents in Nebraska and confirmed 306 schools; however, thirty percent of the county superintendents did not respond to the survey.

Methodology

A 135 item self-administered questionnaire was designed and validated by the researchers for use in data collection in this study. Through contact with state offices of education, mailing addresses were obtained for 672 of the estimated 837 operating one-teacher schools. Questionnaires were mailed to the 672 teachers of which 402 responded for a return of 59.8 percent.

The research instrument posed questions related to the teacher, the students, the community, and history and operation of the school.

The researchers' definition of one-teacher schools did not include specialty, continuation, alternative, or private schools.

Findings

The exact number of one-teacher schools still operating in America is unknown. Research suggests the number is very close to 800. These schools are currently scattered across 28 different states; however, several states (Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, and Maryland) report only one such school. Ten other states report fewer than 10 schools each. The largest number of

TABLE 1

LIST OF STATES WITH TRADITIONAL ONE-TEACHER SCHOOLS OPERATING IN 1980 AS REPORTED BY THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS AND NUMBER OF SCHOOLS IDENTIFIED BY THE RESEARCHERS IN 1984. STATES NOT LISTED REPORTED NO ONE-TEACHER SCHOOLS IN OPERATION.

	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	
STATE	1980	1984
Alabama	4	0
Alaska	31	28
Arizona	10	12
California	54	41
Colorado	not reported	3
Florida	1	1
Idaho	11	23
Kansas	0	1
Kentucky	2	1
Maine	6	13
Maryland	1	1
Michigan	13	17
Mississippi	1	1
Montana	111	99
Nebraska	403	385
Nevada	14	12
New Hampshire	5	7
New Jersey	3	0
New Mexico	2	3
New York	3	3
North Dakota	31	25
Ohio	2	2
Oregon	19	15
Rhode Island	1	0
South Dakota	132	87
Tennessee	1	0
Texas	not reported	4
Utah	3	3
Vermont	8	9
Washington	5	8
West Virginia	2	2
Wyoming	42	31
TOTAL	921	837

Source for NCES Data: Statistics for Public Elementary and Secondary School Systems: Schools, Pupils and Staff, Fall 1980. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1981.

schools are concentrated in Nebraska, Montana, and South Dakota; with sizable numbers in California, Wyoming, Alaska, North Dakota and Idaho.

A summary of research findings obtained from this study includes:

1. The average enrollment per school was 11 students. All schools participating in this study were elementary.
2. Over 50 percent of the teachers reported high community support for their school; however, formal Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) were organized in only seven percent of the communities.
3. The majority of those teaching in one-teacher schools were female (89 percent), and had taught an average of 12 years, of which 4.5 years were in their present school.
4. Most teachers either owned their own homes or rented. In addition, one in every four was provided teacherage by the school district.
5. The typical teacher lived about 10 miles from the school, 34 miles from a shopping area, and over 110 miles from the nearest college or university.
6. Almost half of all teachers held the bachelor's degree, and 30 percent were working toward the master's degree. Teachers indicated that one of the most serious problems in teaching at a one-teacher school was the long distance one must travel to a university to pursue a graduate degree.
7. The typical teacher spent almost six hours in class instruction daily and an additional two and three-fourths hours grading papers and supervising extra-curricular activities.

8. Most teachers (68 percent) were responsible for the school custodial work as well as their teaching duties. Few received compensation (only 8.7 percent).
9. Among the more common methodologies employed in the schools were individualized instruction and peer tutoring. One-third of the teachers also reported frequent use of microcomputers and television in their teaching.
10. According to teachers, over one-third of their students were high achievers; 51 percent were rated as average achievers, and 15 percent were considered low achievers.
11. Over 70 percent of the school buildings were designed and built specifically as a one-teacher school. Most buildings are constructed of wood, and modifications or renovations have been made in three-fourths of all schools.
12. Almost one-half of the schools are also used by community groups for evening or weekend activities.

Remarks

One-teacher schools were once the center of the American educational system. Within the walls of the one-room school literally thousands of Americans learned not only to read, write, and compute problems, but also to understand American democracy and the values associated with it. Though they have all but disappeared, one-teacher schools do continue to operate in America. Our nation's few remaining one-teacher schools are a reminder of a public education system which made education available to virtually all who sought to learn.

The last major research focus on one-teacher schools was conducted over

24 years ago (Lambert, 1960). Perhaps renewed study of those one-teacher schools which remain will offer insights that can benefit today's current educational system--a system which has far outgrown the confines of "the little red school house."

References

Gulliford, Andrew. Country School Legacy: Humanities on the Frontier. Silt, Colorado: County School Legacy, 1981.

Lambert, Sam M. One Teacher Schools Today. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1960.

National Center for Education Statistics. Statistics for Public Elementary and Secondary School Systems: Schools, Pupils, and Staff, Fall 1980. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1981.